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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 06 TOKYO 000710

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [EPET](#) [SNAR](#) [KNNP](#) [UNSC](#) [IZ](#)
EG, AF, IR, JA
SUBJECT: NEW IRANIAN AMBASSADOR IN TOKYO DISCUSSES NUCLEAR
ISSUE, OTHER TOPICS

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Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)
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¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Speaking on the record March 13 at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan, newly accredited Iranian Ambassador to Japan Seyed Abbas Araghchi presented Iran's views of the standoff regarding its nuclear program. He asserted that Iran began its program at the behest of the United States in the 1950's, and that it continued through the 1970's with the active support of the U.S. and other western powers. Following the revolution, he said, the U.S. and others ceased their support, teaching Iran the West can not be trusted to fulfill agreements. Iran has voluntarily cooperated with European countries in an attempt to alleviate concerns, but the Europeans only used negotiations as a ploy to halt Iran's program, teaching Tehran another bitter lesson. Iran is not intimidated by Security Council resolutions. Araghchi said there are two ways to deal with this problem, confrontation or cooperation, and Iran is prepared for either.

¶2. (U) SUMMARY (Continued): Responding to questions, Araghchi said nuclear weapons are relics of the Cold War era that no longer provide any country with security; Iran doubts the Kurds in Iraq will assert their independence and blames the U.S. for creating the tensions that lead to the fear of the breakup of Iraq; Iran's relations with Japan are good, and Iran will continue to supply it oil; Iran seeks to improve relations with Egypt, the other "pillar" of the region; sanctions imposed by the United States have backfired by making Iran more self-reliant; Islamic law recognizes capital punishment, and most death sentences in Iran are carried out against dangerous drug smugglers.

¶3. (C) SUMMARY (Continued): Araghchi is a young, personable, polished, and accomplished diplomat who presents well, argues his case calmly and rationally, and who is clearly at ease making public presentations and dealing with the press. He has been busy cultivating the media since his arrival several weeks ago and we predict he will be very active in diplomatic and media circles as an effective advocate for Iranian policies. END SUMMARY.

14. (U) Ambassador Araghchi began his presentation, which was attended by an Embassy Tokyo political officer, by noting that he'd presented his credentials to the Emperor only two days earlier, and said he was looking forward over the next few years to establishing good contacts and relations with the press. He said he'd like to focus his remarks on Iran's "peaceful nuclear program" in order to clarify commonly held "misunderstandings," and promised to speak for only ten or fifteen minutes.

15. (U) According to Araghchi, the first misunderstanding is that some people believe Iran has a "new", "secret" nuclear program that was commenced following the 1979 revolution. This is quite wrong, he said. In fact, Iran's nuclear program was started in 1957 on the recommendation and at the behest of the United States. Citing a March 5, 1957 agreement between the United States and the Shah, Araghchi asserted that it was the U.S. which told Iran, even at a time when Iran had much more oil than it does now and only half the population, that it needed to develop nuclear energy in order to fully develop as a nation in the decades to come. He quoted from the agreement its assertion that peaceful uses of nuclear energy hold hope for all mankind. Araghchi conceded that Iran has large reserves of oil and gas that could be used to meet many of Iran's energy needs, but said these resources must be held in trust for future generations and, that as was foreseen by the United States, Iran must have nuclear energy to fully develop its economy.

LESSON LEARNED: LACK OF TRUST

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16. (U) Over the years, Araghchi continued, the 1957 agreement was amended and expanded upon. In 1958, Iran joined the IAEA, and in 1974 it joined the NPT and signed the Comprehensive Safeguard Agreements, and agreed to the Additional Protocol, although this decision has yet to be ratified. In 1974, the United States built Iran's first nuclear research reactor in Tehran, while France, Germany, and Canada all offered help on other projects. The French agreed to help Iran develop the capability to enrich uranium, and the Germans agreed to build a nuclear power plant at Busheir. Then came the revolution, and all the agreements and contracts to help Iran were halted by the West for political reasons. This, according to Araghchi, was a bitter lesson to Iran that the West could not be trusted to keep its word. "Today the Western powers speak of a lack of trust in Iran, but we, too, have proven reasons to lack trust in the West." The Germans stopped work on the Busheir plant after Iran had spent "billions" on it, leaving the Iranians no choice but to ask the Russians to take over. And even today, 30 years after the revolution, this plant has not been activated. The important lesson Iran learned from all this, said Araghchi, is that Iran must stand on its own two feet with regard to its nuclear program, and can not rely on the goodwill of others, which could vanish at any time.

NOTHING TO HIDE

17. (U) Araghchi asserted that despite its setbacks, Iran has remained committed to its obligations under the NPT after all these years. "We have nothing to hide, and all our facilities have been or will be open to inspection at the proper times," he said, stating that under the terms of the treaty, a facility is required to be inspected only six months prior to fueling. He said that in 2003, following the invasion of Iraq, the United States began to circulate propaganda that Iran was making a bomb. "The U.S. defeated

the Iraqis in eighteen days, so now it was time to make us next." This caused other countries to begin asking many questions. The EU-3 came to the Iranians and asked them to suspend enrichment, and the Iranians agreed to do so, said Araghchi, because they were confident of their own peaceful intentions. Then the Europeans told them to suspend related activities, and the Iranians agreed. Then the Europeans asked them to suspend research activities, and the Iranians agreed. Then the Europeans asked them to voluntarily implement the Additional Protocol, even though the Iranian government had not finally ratified its participation yet, and the Iranians agreed. Araghchi said all this resulted in many, many inspections of Iran's facilities, including 27 inspections of closed military facilities. Nothing, he said, was ever found to substantiate allegations that Iran was pursuing a nuclear weapons program.

18. (U) In spite of all this voluntary cooperation, continued Araghchi, the Europeans asked Iran to cooperate with the IAEA to grant inspections even beyond those called for by the Additional Protocol, and again the Iranians agreed. IAEA Secretary General ElBaradei would come with information from

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open sources - all of which were American - and the Iranians would always grant access so he could investigate these allegations, none of which was ever substantiated. "All these allegations were baseless."

"ENOUGH"

19. (U) In 2005, after two and a half years of full cooperation with the Europeans, the Iranians finally said "enough", explained Araghchi. He said the EU negotiations had been totally useless. "It was obvious to all that the Europeans had already succeeded in their goal of stopping our nuclear program, so they were just prolonging negotiations to play with us." The Iranians said the suspension was only supposed to be a short-term one and announced their intention to resume work on their peaceful nuclear program. The Europeans then offered a package of incentives. "In August 2005, they asked us to give up our right to enrichment and

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told us to dismantle our program in return for useless promises: support for our efforts to join the WTO, access to aircraft parts, and better access to the internet." Araghchi termed this offer "insulting and ridiculous." He said the Europeans had been told from the beginning that any package would be a nonstarter if it did not assure the Iranians would retain their right to pursue enrichment activities.

110. (U) So this, said Araghchi, was another hard, negative lesson learned by the Iranians: Iran could not, through negotiations with the Europeans, achieve its rights under the NPT to pursue a peaceful nuclear program. The Europeans threatened to take Iran to the Security Council, but Iran was not intimidated, said "okay" and reactivated its peaceful nuclear program.

MORE HISTORY: 1953 COUP

111. (U) Araghchi then cited history again, harkening back to 1953. He recalled that the Iranians at that time moved to nationalize their oil industry, which was controlled by the British. The British in turn went to the Security Council, citing Iran's move as a threat to international peace and security. This was followed by the American-led coup against Prime Minister Mossadeq, who was one of the leaders of the nationalization movement. The result, Araghchi said, was a return to dictatorship in Iran that lasted for twenty-five years. "This is the price we paid for wanting to have

control over our own oil", he said, implying that Iran is willing to face similar hardships to assure its "right" to its own, domestic nuclear energy program.

THE IAEA WORK PLAN

¶12. (U) Araghchi then turned to the IAEA work plan, explaining that in August 2007, then-Iranian chief nuclear negotiator Ali Larijini and EU Chief Negotiator Javier Solana had agreed the IAEA would give Iran any remaining questions, and Iran would answer them. As a result, the IAEA submitted six questions and three other "allegations" for Iran to answer. Araghchi began to read from the work plan, noting language in the last paragraph that says once a successful response is received, the Iranian case will be considered a "routine" one. He then cited ElBaradei's September 12 report as stating it would be a significant step forward if Iran answers the six questions, which would then allow the IAEA to reconstruct the history of Iran's nuclear program. Accordingly, argued Araghchi, Iran since September 2007 has been working with the IAEA to answer all the questions.

¶13. (U) ElBaradei's February 22 report confirms that all six questions posed in the work plan have been successfully answered, asserted Araghchi. So all that remains are the "allegations." He continued that according to the agreement, the IAEA was to provide Iran with any evidence or papers concerning these allegations, and Iran was to study them and respond with their own assessment. "That is all that is required." But, he complained, some of these papers were only received one week before ElBaradei's report was to be issued, making it impossible for Iran to fully examine them and provide a response in time. Araghchi concluded on this point by asking rhetorically who the burden should rest upon to prove these allegations, implicitly answering that it should rest on those who make them, not Iran.

SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE

¶14. (U) Araghchi sought to conclude by down-playing the Security Council resolutions that have been enacted against Iran. "Do we deserve another resolution after all our cooperation? No. That is why we have rejected them." He said all the latest resolution does is add a few names to the list of those already under restrictions, and asserted even U.S. and European diplomats have admitted the resolutions are

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"soft." "This is all they can come up with. Following the two month deadline from the first resolution, it took them an additional ten months to come up with this weak new one. This shows that other Security Council members agree that resolutions are not the solution."

¶15. (U) He also asserted the resolutions seek to punish Iran for actions it might take in the future, rather than actions already taken. He cited the NIE as confirmation that Iran does not have a nuclear weapons program "and that we never had one." Because the resolutions punish Iran for actions not taken, they are unfair, unjust, and cannot succeed.

FINAL WORD: "WE ARE READY"

¶16. (U) Concluding his prepared remarks, which ran much longer than his promised ten minutes, Araghchi said there are two ways to deal with the nuclear issue: cooperation or confrontation. "We are prepared for both. We only want our rights under the NPT, and we are not prepared to give up these rights."

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

117. (U) Following Araghchi's prepared remarks, the floor was opened to questions from the journalists.

Middle East Nuclear Free Zone

"Iran supports the concept of a nuclear free zone in the Middle East and has sponsored resolutions in the OIC about this. Nuclear weapons belong in the Cold War era. They are worthless today. They cannot guarantee security to any country. Israel's nuclear arsenal did not prevent its defeat at the hands of Hizbollah. Nuclear weapons did not prevent the collapse of the Soviet Union, nor did they prevent 9/11. Even if we get one bomb, what can we do with it? What is it good for?"

Kosovo Recognition; Kurdish Independence?

"Whether to recognize Kosovo is under consideration. As for a possible Kurdish declaration of an independent state, I don't think this will happen. The Kurds are very happy with the situation in Iraq right now. The President is a Kurd, a Vice Prime Minister is a Kurd, the Foreign Minister is a Kurd. There are no signs of a move toward independence. But the integrity of Iraq is very important to Iran and other countries in the region. The current problem there is the result of wrong U.S. policies. If left alone, the Iraqis will not separate. The Shia, Sunnis and Kurds have a long history of living together there. The terrorists and occupation forces that are in Iraq today are using each other to justify their continued presence. The U.S. says it is there to fight terrorists, the terrorists say they are there to fight the foreign occupiers. The U.S. should break this cycle by coming up with an exit strategy."

Iran's View of Japan

"We share much in common with Japan because both of us have been victims of weapons of mass destruction. The Japanese were victims of nuclear weapons, and we were the victims of chemical weapons used by Saddam given to him by Western countries. We suffered a lot and still do, people are still dying every day from their exposure during the war. So I think neither Japan or Iran will ever use weapons of mass destruction against another. Japan has a very good reputation in Iran because of its advanced technology and honesty. We have very good relations.

Support and Training for Hamas and Hizbollah?

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"The Americans have a bad situation in Iraq and cannot solve their problems, so they accuse others on the Palestinian issue. They need to focus on the root causes of this problem, but instead of focusing on them, they just accuse others."

Iranian Relations with Egypt

"We have no official political relations but have a good relationship nonetheless. We would like to reestablish official relations, and negotiations to do so have begun. In my previous assignment I visited Cairo to discuss this, and my counterpart has visited Iran. We work closely in the United Nations, the OIC, and the Non-aligned Movement. We have more ministerial-level meetings with Egypt than we do with many other countries we do have relations with. Egypt

and Iran are the two most important pillars in the region, so we must be in close consultations."

Status of Related Nuclear Technology

"We have completed the fuel cycle. We have uranium mines and can make yellow-cake. We can change this yellow-cake into UF6 gas to feed into our centrifuges, and we are capable of producing less-than-five percent enriched uranium. We have a nuclear power plant in Busheir, the one built by the Russians, and although it is not yet on-line, we think we can start it by the end of the year. We also are working on a 360 MW nuclear power plant we're building ourselves, although this will take time. This has been the positive result of the isolation we've been under. The U.S. wanted to isolate us, but instead they have forced us to become self-reliant."

Reduction of Oil and Gas Exports?

"In politics, anything is possible, but we have no current plans to stop or restrict oil exports. This is not our policy at this time. The sanctions don't touch our oil industry, and we will continue to be a reliable supplier of oil to Japan."

Preferred U.S. Presidential Candidate?

"The election in the U.S. is for Americans to decide. We do not support any candidate."

Death Penalty in Iran, Minors and Women?

"Capital punishment is recognized by Islam in Sharia law, and since our laws are based on this, we cannot just abolish a part of our Islamic belief. I disagree that women and minors are executed. Our system is against this, and there is a long, tough procedure to be followed before sentencing. Minors are not executed, but the age of majority in our laws may be different from yours. Stoning has been stopped, there is a moratorium on this. In fact, a judge who recently sentenced someone to be stoned was dismissed from his position. We do execute people by hanging. Most of these are drug smugglers. We have a serious problem with this in Iran. Everyone knows that ninety percent of all opium produced comes from Afghanistan and much of it transits through Iran on its way to Europe. We have a very long border with Afghanistan that is hard to control, and the drug smugglers are very sophisticated and well armed, even with anti-aircraft weapons. They have killed 3,000 of our police and border guards. As you know, these smugglers are currently holding a Japanese citizen hostage in a third country. Most of our death sentences are handed down against criminals like these."

COMMENT

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118. (C) Araghchi is a young, personable, polished and accomplished diplomat. He spoke English very well, with only a slight accent, and was at ease and low-key throughout his presentation. The demeanor he used throughout his talk was one of resignation and frustration, rather than of confrontation or self-righteousness, and anyone with a limited understanding of the facts would walk away after hearing him with the idea that Iran has bent over backwards and tried everything possible to please the West without result. Even when he expressed Iran's willingness to defy the international community his message was delivered evenly and in a rational tone. He exudes an air of understated yet

passionate belief in the position he is arguing.

¶19. (C) The Japanese diplomatic establishment has always been very impressed by Araghchi. MOFA Second Middle East Division Principal Deputy Director Motosada Matano told Embassy Tokyo that former Foreign Minister Taro Aso speculated after meeting him in his former capacity as Deputy Foreign Minister for International and Legal Affairs that if the U.S. and Iran were to resume diplomatic relations, Araghchi would be a likely candidate to become Ambassador to Washington.

¶20. (U) Since arriving in Tokyo several weeks ago, Araghchi has been very active cultivating relationships with the media and within the diplomatic community. In a press conference on February 28 he suggested that Japan would be a good country to act as an intermediary between the United States and Iran. In an interview with Kyodo on March 12, he repeated this again, saying the U.S. is "the master of miscalculations" and that he hoped "Japan, which has a good understanding of the Middle East region, can help by recommending Americans to follow wisdom." On March 4 he met with Foreign Minister Koumura, and in his remarks he mentioned that he had met the previous day with the Iraqi Ambassador. Unlike his predecessor, who seemed quite hard-line and was not seen much in the public light, it appears that Araghchi plans to make himself a presence on the diplomatic and media circuits as an articulate and persuasive advocate for Iranian policy.
SCHIEFFER